

Sermon for Evening Prayerⁱ

Trinity Sunday

I. Lessons:ⁱⁱ

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-third Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.ⁱⁱⁱ

“The pride of the height, the clear firmament, the beauty of heaven, with his glorious shew [**SHOW**]; The sun when it appeareth, declaring at his rising a marvellous instrument, the work of the most High: At noon it parcheth the country, and who can abide the burning heat thereof? A man blowing a furnace is in works of heat, but the sun burneth the mountains three times more; breathing out fiery vapours, and sending forth bright beams, it dimmeth the eyes. Great is the Lord that made it; and at his commandment runneth hastily. He made the moon also to serve in her season for a declaration of times, and a sign of the world. From the moon is the sign of feasts, a light that decreaseth in her perfection. The month is called after her name, increasing wonderfully in her changing, being an instrument of the armies above, shining in the firmament of heaven; The beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars, an ornament giving light in the highest places of the Lord. At the commandment of the Holy One they will stand in their order, and never faint in their watches. Look upon the rainbow, and praise him that made it; very beautiful it is in the brightness thereof. It compasseth the heaven about with a glorious circle, and the hands of the most High have bended it. ... We may speak much, and yet come short: wherefore in sum, he is all. How shall we be able to magnify him? for he is great above all his works. The Lord is terrible and very great, and marvellous is his power. When ye glorify the Lord, exalt him as much as ye can; for even yet will he far exceed: and when ye exalt him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for ye can never go far enough. Who hath seen him, that he might tell us? and who can magnify him as he is? There are yet hid greater things than these be, for we have seen but a few of his works. For the Lord hath made all things; and to the godly hath he given wisdom.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.^{iv}

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the Second Lesson: “I ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.”^v In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

III. Introduction:

Among Christians in general, we used to hear a great deal said about the need for “Christian unity”. Usually these statements began by bemoaning the multiplicity of Christian denominations and jurisdictions, complained that these

administrative divisions confused our message to the unchurched, and included at least one reference to Our Lord's prayer to the Father for His followers, "that they may be one".^{vi}

Today, we do not hear so much about the desirability of some sort of generic "unity" among all Christians. Perhaps this is because most of those who used to speak in those terms are now instead focused on, and are actively promoting, the idea that all religions are of equal value in promoting the welfare of humankind. Thus where to them Christianity no longer has any unique value, they no longer have any interest in strengthening Christianity's witness to the world.

Certainly the organizations that were the product of that movement for a generic and ill-defined Christian "unity", such as the World Council of Churches, have shown themselves to be no more effective at furthering the salvation men and women than are the other religions that compete with Christianity. So perhaps the prevailing attitude of indifferentism and even syncretism is something not to be unexpected.

IV. Theme:

However, the situation is rather different for those of us who pursue our church lives within the so-called "Continuing Churches", and for those of us who struggle to maintain an orthodox Christian existence within but on the fringes of the new Anglican world order. We are regularly urged to exert greater efforts toward "unity" and these urgings, like those heard formerly about Christianity in general, almost invariably begin by bemoaning the multiplicity of Anglican jurisdictions and bodies, complain that these administrative divisions damage our credibility with the non-Anglican majority of Christianity, and quote Our Lord's prayer "that they may be one".^{vii}

Of course, these commendations of "unity" seldom or never attempt to elucidate just what meaningful "unity" really means or how it is feasibly to be attained. Instead, we are frequently offered, as ostensibly useful advice, injunctions along the lines of "Just do it!" or "Lock all the Bishops in one room and don't let them out until they are agreed!"

V. Developement:

Unfortunately, the laws on false imprisonment prevent us from using that last method to obtain institutional or corporate unity. Fortunately, today's Second Lesson lays out St. Paul's better-informed interpretation of what Our Lord meant by our being one. And if we examine the criteria St. Paul puts before us, we can see that we have already achieved a very substantial degree of the most important forms of unity.

A. One Lord.

All who call themselves Christians, and certainly all who call themselves Anglicans, read the same canonical Scriptures. We all see therein the account of how Jesus Christ called to Himself a body of Apostles and disciples, how He instructed and formed those followers, how He inspired them with the Holy Spirit, and how He constituted them into His Church, charged with being His presence in this world during the time between His Ascension and His next Coming. Thus we all accept *a priori* that He is Our Lord.

Similarly, we all acknowledge the authority of the Nicene Creed as the Church's traditional statement of its Faith.^{viii} And in that Creed our second affirmation is of "one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God..."^{ix} This statement declares that Jesus Christ is ***Our*** Lord, that is, Lord of His Church and therefore also Lord of each of us whom He has called into His Church. Where all who recite this Creed acknowledge one common Master, it is not difficult for us to recognize that we are all united in His service, that we are all servants in His household or *oikumene* [***eh*-cue-MEN-ay**].

B. One Faith.

As we have just noted, all Christians who would be orthodox – lower case "o", that is, "right-believing" – share the essential bases of the acknowledged canonical Scriptures and at least one Creed. While there are, sadly, those today who would twist and pervert the message of the Scriptures to fit their own socio-political agenda, those of us who consciously strive to be traditional Christians all share a common reverence for the classic canons of Scriptural exegesis.

Thus, in the most fundamental way, we are already at unity in many major points of what we all believe. There certainly remain differences between the various communions and traditions, such as over the inherent authority of certain

Church offices, and even over the proper conduct of our basic forms of worship, but over the issues that constitute the declarations of the Creed we are all in agreement.

C. One Baptism.

Our Lord inaugurated His public ministry by having Himself baptized by John the Baptist.^x Then He Himself had His Apostles and disciples baptize those who became His followers.^{xi} Just prior to His Ascension, He commanded His Apostles and disciples to continue this practice by baptizing their new converts in the Name of the Triune God^{xii} and those Apostles and disciples, and their successors, have adhered to that command ever since.^{xiii}

Protestant bodies that do not accept the objective reality of the Sacraments nevertheless baptize their members in humble obedience to that command, even when they do not believe that any actual good is being accomplished thereby. Indeed, one large Protestant tradition, the Baptist one, derives its common name from the assiduousness with which it complies with this commandment.

Because these Protestants believe that they are doing as the Church has always done in Baptism, and because they use – or at least always used to use^{xiv} – either immersion or the effusion of water in the Names of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, the Catholic portion of Christianity has traditionally accepted these Baptisms as valid Sacraments. Thus all of us from the traditional wing of Christianity are united in this fundamental act that joins each of us to Our Lord and incorporates us into His Body.

D. One God and Father.

As we have noted previously, all traditionally-minded Christians share the same canonical Scriptures and at least one of the historic Creeds. The entire Old Testament of those Scriptures is a testimony to the existence and work of the First Person of the Trinity, God the Father and Creator, as is the opening clause of the Nicene Creed.

But where we are all children of one divine Father, we are all already united in that most fundamental of bonds, that of the family.

VI. Conclusion:

So when anyone begins complaining to you about our sad state of disunity, remind him – and yourself – about all the ways we are already united as disciples of Our Lord. We all address our prayers to the same God even when we address our checks to different treasurers. We must emphasize the issues which we share among the various communions and traditions just as much or even more than we emphasize those which divide us.

Certainly those divisive issues must be dealt with but they will be much easier to overcome if we keep it firmly fixed in mind that we are already – and have been since the beginning of the Church – much farther down the road toward unity than readily appears. It is natural that our daily preoccupations lead us to concentrate on the details of our lives within particular communions or denominations, and therefore upon the familiar characteristic customs and practices of those communions and denominations, but that inevitably underlines the distinctions between us and not the bonds of faith and charity that tie us together.

So every so often, it is necessary that we lift our gaze beyond our own local walls and look for “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”^{xv} of which St. Paul reminded the Ephesians.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister^{xvi}
May 30, 2010.

ⁱ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ecclesiasticus* 43: 1-12, 27-33 (KJV).

^{iv} *Ephesians* 4: 1-16 (KJV).

^v *Ephesians* 4: 1-6 (RSV).

^{vi} *St. John* 17: 11b (RSV).

^{vii} *St. John* 17: 11b (RSV).

^{viii} *This is not to denigrate the importance to Anglicans of the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed. Those two historic statements of the Faith, however, are products of the Western half of the Church and have been incorporated into Western liturgies. They have never*

been accepted by the entire Church world-wide; they are, for example, virtually unknown to the Eastern Orthodox.

^{ix} *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 71 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

^x *St. Matthew 3: 13-17; St. Mark 1: 9; St. Luke 3: 21-22.*

^{xi} *St. John 4: 1-2.*

^{xii} *St. Matthew 28: 19.*

^{xiii} *See, e.g., Acts 2: 41.*

^{xiv} *In the decades since World War II, increasing numbers of what were once "main stream" Protestants have deviated from these traditional requirements. Of these deviations, the mere sprinkling with water is perhaps the mildest. Others have included the substitution of flower petals for water and modalistic or even pagan formulae for the Diety. It therefore behooves every Catholic clergyman to inquire closely into the circumstances of the baptism of every prospective member of our Church.*

^{xv} *Ephesians 4: 3b (RSV).*

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